



Chile

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. A 1999 law, "Norms for the Legal Establishment of Churches and Religious Organizations," commonly known as the "Ley de Cultos," gives other religious entities the same legal status that the Roman Catholic Church enjoys; however, the Catholic Church unofficially retains a privileged position. The Unification Church was denied registration under the 1999 law on the basis that it represented a threat to public order and the family. At the end of the period covered by this report, a Unification Church appeal was pending a Supreme Court hearing.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 292,260 square miles, and its population is just over 15 million. Seventy percent of the population age 14 or older was identified as Roman Catholic by the 2002 census (down from 76.8 percent in 1992).

In the census, the term evangelical refers to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of the Orthodox Church (Greek, Persian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Armenian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 90 percent of evangelicals were Pentecostal. According to the 2002 census, evangelicals totaled 1,699,725 persons, or 15.1 percent of the population over the age of 14 (up from 12.4 percent in 1992).

Other affiliations recorded in the 2002 census were Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), Jews (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). All other religions totaled 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent. Atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constituted approximately 8.3 percent (931,990) of the population over the age of 14 (up from 5.8 percent in 1992). Members of the largest faiths are numerous in the capital; and Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and other evangelical churches also are active in other regions of the country. Jewish communities are located in Santiago, Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepcion, and Iquique (although there is no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques are found in Santiago and Iquique.

Indigenous people make up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Of this group, 65 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 29 percent as evangelicals, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continue to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicates a high degree of syncretism in worship and persistence of traditional healing practices. Many indigenous people consider these cultural rather than religious practices.

The Baha'is are not mentioned in the census; adherents estimate the number of practitioners at 6,000.

Traditional Protestant churches, including Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist, are present. There is also a small Buddhist population and a very small number of Unification Church members.

Foreign missionaries operate freely, and many priests are of foreign origin.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion ("Ley de Cultos") includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. In addition to Catholic events, government officials attend major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies. The law allows any religion to obtain legal public right status (comprehensive religious nonprofit status). Under the law, the Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the Ministry or challenge the Ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the State no longer has the authority to dissolve it by decree. Instead, the semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that has registered under the Ley de Cultos has been deregistered.

In addition, the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may set up affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate corporations.

As of August 2004, 756 religious groups and related organizations had registered under the new law. Of those, 465 had completed the registration process and gained legal public right status. This number included the Roman Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopalian), several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, Islamic mosques, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The remaining 291 entities had not completed all the requirements for incorporation.

The registration process is often delayed due to the complexities of formulating a new charter and bylaws. Many groups have also delayed registration due to the taxes and fees involved in the transference of property from the old legal entity to the new one. The Ministry of Justice formed a committee that includes representatives of affected organizations to develop a way to avoid payment of the taxes and fees for the initial re-registration.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, four Catholic holy days are celebrated as national holidays: Corpus Christi, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The 1999 law on religion grants other religions and denominations the same right that the Catholic Church possesses to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Roman Catholic chaplains in hospitals, and if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other faiths. There are 35 Catholic chapels, 39 paid Catholic chaplains, and more than 1,000 volunteers authorized to conduct religious activities in the prison system. Prison authorities have established two evangelical Christian chaplain positions at a national level, and every prison has designated evangelical Christian pastoral workers. Non-Catholic pastors reported that their access to prisons and hospitals was generally good during the period covered by this report.

The celebration of a Roman Catholic Mass frequently marks public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to attend. The military unofficially integrated a number of Protestant and evangelical Christian chaplains, but it continued to block efforts by non-Christian religious groups to provide military chaplains, and as of June 2005, regulations implementing the 1999 law had not been promulgated. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Catholic Church is considered beneficial to a military career, and in the navy, it is said to be almost a requirement for advancement to the highest posts. In 2001, an ecumenical chapel was opened in the Investigative Police Academy, and an evangelical Christian chaplain was appointed. Two ethics instructors at the Academy were evangelical Christians. In 2004, the Ministry of Defense named Catholic and evangelical Christian chaplains and offered regular religious services in a chapel in the ministry.

Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Roman Catholic. Schools are required to offer religious education, on an optional basis, twice a week through middle school. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax, and religious education in faiths other than Roman Catholicism is often provided privately through Sunday schools and at other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. Although curricula are approved for 14 other denominations, 92 percent of public schools and 81 percent of private schools offer instruction based only on the Roman Catholic faith. Evangelical church leaders reported continued resistance by school administrators, based on economic considerations, to appointing evangelical religion teachers in the Santiago suburbs of Quinta Normal and Puente Alto.

In 2003, the Ministry of Justice issued an objection to the registration of the Unification Church, on the basis that the Unification

Church's doctrine threatened the constitutional order. On March 30, 2005, a Santiago Appeals Court ruled the Unification Church could be denied legal public right status on grounds that the Church represented a threat to public order and the family. This was the first time under the 1999 law that an organization's registration was contested for other than technical reasons. The Unification Church filed an appeal and, at the end of the period covered by this report, the case was pending a hearing before the Supreme Court.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some discrimination occurred.

Ecumenical groups exist, including the Ecumenical Brotherhood of Chile, bringing together diverse Christian churches; the Abrahamic Forum, bringing together Jews, Christians and Muslims; and the Judeo-Christian Confraternity. These groups organize periodic dialogues to address specific social issues. Universities and seminaries also organize interreligious dialogues and events.

Investigations into the July 2004 killing of Father Faustino Gazziero D'Estefani in the Cathedral of Santiago revealed that satanism was a possible motivation for the attack. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were no further updates on the status of the case.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy sponsored the training of four military chaplains in the United States in 2004. In addition, Embassy representatives met with a wide range of religious leaders, including Santiago's archbishop and key representatives of evangelical and Jewish organizations. The Embassy also continued to maintain informal contact with representatives and leaders of several other faiths.

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